

St Thomas More High School

Kenilworth Gardens, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 0BW

Inspection dates 11–12 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The energy and drive of the headteacher and senior leaders have ensured that an ethos of high aspiration and strong pastoral care is communicated well across the academy community.
- The academy has its core values firmly rooted in the Roman Catholic faith. The values of respect and tolerance are reflected in the positive relationships between staff and pupils, and the good behaviour of pupils around the academy.
- The academy curriculum has been carefully crafted to be broad and well balanced to meet the needs of all students. Students' spiritual, social, moral, and cultural development is promoted well and students are prepared well for the future.
- Attainment has consistently remained at or above national levels at GCSE for the past few years. The progress of students is particularly strong in mathematics and science and is rapidly improving in English.
- The quality of teaching is good across the academy. This is monitored effectively by senior leaders and governors.
- Governors bring a range of relevant experience and expertise to their role. They are rigorous in holding senior leaders to account.
- The academy's procedures for keeping students safe are outstanding. The academy has worked hard to increase attendance rates and reduce exclusions.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The high quality of marking seen in many subjects is not consistent across the academy.
- The current academy development plan does not focus the academy's leaders enough on raising achievement.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Given their starting points, some students have not made sufficient progress.
- The behaviour of students in the sixth form requires improvement because they do not always show the positive attitudes to learning which will enable them to make the best use of their study time.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 39 lessons, of which 10 were in the sixth form, to observe behaviour and the quality of learning.
- Ten observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspection team took into account the 99 responses to the on-line parental questionnaire, Parent View, and the 12 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspection team met with governors and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. They also met with senior and middle leaders, and different groups of students, including those in the sixth form.
- The inspection team scrutinised the academy’s self-evaluation documentation, which included evidence from governors’ minutes, the academy development plan, academy policies and progress information.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of students in the academy and those attending external providers were examined by inspectors.

Inspection team

Pete Sewell, Lead inspector	Seconded Inspector
Paul Lawrence	Seconded Inspector
Margaret Dutton	Additional Inspector
Russell Ayling	Additional Inspector

Pete Sewell and Paul Lawrence are appointed as Additional Inspectors, under the powers relating to additional inspectors, in paragraph 11 of Part 2 of Schedule 12 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas More High School is larger than the average-sized secondary academy.
- It is an academy trust in the Diocese of Brentwood. The academy is a single-sex boys' school for Year 7 to Year 11. It has a mixed sixth form which makes up a quarter of the students. Most students are from a White British background. The proportion of students from different ethnic backgrounds is slightly above average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium grant (this is money the academy receives to support disadvantaged students such as those entitled to receive free school meals or in the care of the local authority) is one in six which is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is one in eight which is below average.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A very small number of students follow an alternative curriculum; to name the provision might identify the students.
- The academy is part of a sixth form consortium and a small minority of students attend lessons at different local schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching and achievement of students in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that teachers focus on the progress that students are making from their starting points and that teachers provide timely interventions to speed up students' progress when necessary
 - ensuring that students are well organised and use their study time in the academy effectively.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that all teachers give high-quality feedback through their marking, sharing the strong practice observed in some subjects.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - remodelling the academy development plan so that all initiatives focus on accelerating students' progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has ensured that her drive and enthusiasm for academy improvement is shared with her senior colleagues and the wider teaching staff. As an exceptional practitioner, she leads by example and has set high standards across the academy.
- The senior team is a cohesive group of effective leaders, who, under the direction of the headteacher, have focused on ensuring that standards are rising across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. An inclusive ethos, shared by the headteacher and governors, is well established in all areas of academy life. The vast majority of parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the academy to others.
- The academy mission statement, 'To keep our Catholic ethos at the centre of our lives,' was clearly evident throughout the inspection, in the positive relationships in the classroom between staff and students, and in the manner in which students conducted themselves around the academy. This was also seen on inspection through meditative sessions in the academy chapel, the work of the 'justice and peace' group and the mentoring which takes place between sixth form students and others in the academy. This is evidence of strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. The academy has used a 'market place' to encourage staff to share best practice so that teachers are better equipped to develop their own teaching skills. This is having a positive impact in the classroom. A shared bank of resources developed by the literacy coordinator and others is well used by staff.
- Newly qualified teachers are complimentary about the active support the academy has given them as they seek to improve the quality of their teaching. A successful coaching programme operates in the academy and several have benefitted from this support.
- Middle leaders are having a positive impact on achievement. They have a relentless focus on the progress of the students for whom they are responsible. The quality of professional development and support they have had from senior leaders has enabled them to monitor the teaching in their areas and challenge where necessary. Some teachers have had the opportunity to observe senior leadership meetings and the academy is actively encouraging these individuals to develop their leadership skills to strengthen further the capacity of the academy to improve.
- The academy has successfully introduced new tracking systems across the academy. Students' progress is monitored rigorously across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 by middle and senior leaders.
- The academy has a highly creative and passionate literacy coordinator, who provides weekly bulletins to staff about useful strategies firmly rooted in pedagogy (the way that teachers teach). This was effectively employed in science lessons where a 'learning mat' provided support for students who struggled with extended writing tasks. The academy also has a highly successful debating team which has successfully taken part in numerous competitions.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and there is a variety of pathways open to students at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. The inclusive philosophy, a vein which runs through the academy, means that there is extensive support for vulnerable and disadvantaged students both in the academy and through close collaboration with external agencies; this ensures that all students have an opportunity to succeed.
- The academy rigorously promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination. Through personal, social and health education, religious education and citizenship lessons, all students are fully prepared for life in modern Britain. These lessons are used effectively to challenge discrimination and prejudice of any kind. This is backed up through a series of focused assemblies and follow-up sessions.
- The academy's enrichment programme is extensive and fully supports the curriculum. Already this year students have had the opportunity to visit the First World War battlefields and Paris. There have been

geography trips to Arran and Lulworth Cove. The academy uses its mountain-leadership-trained staff to run the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme for the gold award and to take outward-bound visits to Snowdonia and the Brecon Beacons. To provide a spiritual focus the academy organises regular retreats to Walsingham House and Aylsford Priory. The academy also has a number of successful sports teams. During the final feedback meeting, inspectors were told that the Year 11 football team had just reached the semi-final of the national English school competition.

- The academy provides effective support for students when they are making decisions about the next stage in their life. They speak highly of the careers support and guidance they receive.
- The academy receives highly effective support from the Brentwood Diocesan Secondary Heads' Association (BDSHA) and is an active partner in the South Essex Teaching School Alliance (SETSA). The academy has received some support from the local authority which was effective for the initial period following the previous inspection report.
- Leadership of special educational needs is effective. The students who are supported in this area are making good progress because of the high quality intervention they receive from both teachers and teaching assistants. The academy has recently adopted some new teaching strategies but it is too early to measure the impact of these.
- The academy uses the pupil premium grant and Year 7 catch-up grant effectively to support disadvantaged students. This process starts during transition from primary school and is having a positive impact on the progress of these students, notably through the purchase of laptops and software to improve reading.
- Leadership of the sixth form requires improvement because the academy has focused almost entirely on attainment at GCE A level and AS level and not enough on the progress that students are making from their starting points.
- The academy's view of its own performance is broadly accurate but the academy development plan does not focus sufficiently on the impact that strategies are having on students' achievement. Self-evaluation is not always focused on students' progress, especially in the sixth form.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are an impressive group with considerable experience and expertise which they are using effectively to hold senior leaders to account. They are actively involved in the life of the academy and as a result have a good grasp of the quality of teaching across the academy. They oversee the process of teachers' performance effectively and ensure that teachers' pay and progression are closely matched to the achievement of students. Governors have ensured that they have received appropriate training to understand academy progress information and to ensure that students are kept safe. The academy meets all the statutory safeguarding requirements.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students show respect and are courteous towards each other, staff and visitors in a range of contexts. They take pride in their academy, treat their environment with respect and are highly supportive of the work the academy does to instil positive values of respect and tolerance. The academy has ensured that its Christian ethos and values have impacted on all aspects of life around the academy.
- Parents and staff have a very positive view of the way that behaviour is managed at the academy.
- In the vast majority of lessons, students have positive attitudes towards their learning and as a result make good progress. Students cooperate well together in shared activities and the widespread introduction of peer assessment and shared learning has enabled these positive attitudes to drive up

achievement.

- The academy council is a vibrant organisation and is one of many examples where students are encouraged to take an active role in the life of the academy. Sixth form students are trained to act as mentors to younger students. This was seen being effectively employed to support the reading of disadvantaged students in Year 7 and also to challenge the most able students in Year 9. The sixth form students value this opportunity to take a more active role in the academy community and there is a tangible impact on the progress of the students that this work supports.
- The attitudes to learning of some students in the sixth form requires improvement because they do not make effective use of the study time they have available between lessons.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- The academy's safeguarding arrangements are effective and meet statutory requirements. These were tested by the inspection team and the academy was able to demonstrate the impact of actions taken to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are secure.
- The academy has rigorously tracked and monitored attendance and as a result attendance rates are well above national figures. The academy's work to reduce the high number of exclusions noted in earlier years has been highly effective. Exclusion rates across almost all groups are now below national figures.
- The academy has ensured that the very few students that follow an alternative curriculum have good attendance and that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching and learning across the academy is good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use this to plan creative and challenging lessons which stimulate and hold the students' interest and are purposeful. This was used effectively during a Year 11 music lesson where the teacher used skill and subject knowledge to demonstrate and model various elements of the musical score the students were studying. This enabled the students to recall and use vital information they would need in their examinations.
- Where staff use carefully-crafted questioning to elicit answers which require deep thinking, rapid progress is made. The widespread use of self and peer-assessment through the 'green pen strategy' has been effective in raising standards. Students have been trained to recognise high quality answers and routinely redraft their work to improve it. The use of DIRT (dedicated improvement and reflection time) has been successfully employed across the academy and gives students the opportunity to correct mistakes and address misconceptions.
- Strong, positive relationships in the classroom are a common feature across the academy. Students feel well supported by their teachers and recognise the impact that clear learning objectives and high expectations are having on their achievement.
- The quality of teaching over time is particularly strong in mathematics. In these lessons learning is closely monitored and the teaching is adjusted if necessary, to ensure that the pace of learning does not slow. Students make good progress because marking and feedback are consistent and rigorous and help students to improve their understanding. Teaching is also highly effective in many other areas including science, computing, psychology, history and GCSE physical education.
- Most teachers have high expectations of the progress their students can make. They make good use of the information they are given about different students' starting points and varying needs, by challenging and stretching all groups of students.

- The progress of students in English has been a concern in the past. This is no longer the case. The school has done considerable work to ensure that assessment information is accurate. The legacy of some poor teaching has also been addressed and achievement in English is rising.
- In a few cases, the quality of teachers' marking and feedback is not regular and consistent. In these classes, students cannot make rapid progress because misconceptions are missed or not addressed quickly enough.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form requires improvement because some students lack the organisational skills required to ensure their notes are in order and available for effective revision. This restricts the progress they make. This has not been monitored effectively enough by teachers and leaders.

The achievement of students is good

- Attainment at GCSE has fluctuated but has been at, or above the national average for the past three years. The academy tracks progress very closely and ensures that students make good progress from their different starting points across a wide range of subjects.
- The progress of students in mathematics is notably strong. The proportion making expected progress is well above the national average. The proportion making more than expected progress is also well above national figures. In English, the proportion making expected progress is broadly in line with national figures. Academy information indicates that this proportion will rise in both subjects this year.
- The gap between the progress of disadvantaged students and their peers is closing rapidly. In English, in 2013, these students were nearly one grade behind their peers nationally and two thirds of a grade behind other students in the academy. This gap had reduced by 2014 so they were one third of a grade behind nationally but they almost caught up with their peers in the academy. In mathematics the gaps in 2014 had closed to within half a grade both nationally and within the academy. A strong focus on this group of students across the academy is having a positive impact on their achievement and they are making good progress from their starting points.
- The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs is good. The rigorous tracking of, and intervention for, these students combined with relentless high expectations are leading to accelerated progress.
- The most able students are making good progress. The proportion of these students making expected progress in English and mathematics is strong and school information indicates this will rise considerably in 2015. In the 2014 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students attaining the highest grades was significantly higher than the national average in geography, art and design, physics and chemistry. In the sixth form there was a rise in 2014 in the proportion of students achieving A*-B grades at GCE A level and AS level.
- Students for whom English is not their first language are making exceptional progress.
- The academy does not enter any students early for examinations.
- The achievement of the very few students that follow an alternative curriculum is good.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement because, while standards of attainment are rising, the proportion of students that do not make the expected progress from their starting points is too high.

The sixth form provision requires improvement

- There has been a declining trend in the progress made by sixth form students from their different starting points in both academic and vocational courses. Academy information indicates that this decline will be

halted in 2015.

- Leaders' view of the performance of the sixth form has been too optimistic and they have failed to identify this fall in progress and address it quickly enough. They have been too focused on attainment without taking into account how much progress this represents. There is insufficient detail in the academy development plan about how improvements in achievement will be secured.
- There has been a rise in attainment from 2013 to 2014 across the sixth form, with more students attaining A*-E and A*-B grades at both GCE A level and AS level.
- There has historically been a gap in attainment between boys and girls. This gap has been closed and girls now achieve as well as boys.
- The academy has a highly inclusive policy of recruitment. Students feel highly valued and supported by the academy and many speak positively of the second chance they have been given. The academy has an outstanding record of keeping students safe and providing opportunities for success.
- Disadvantaged students and those with disabilities or special educational needs make progress at least in line with other students and in some cases better progress.
- Where students are particularly well organised they make good progress. This was noted in students' learning files in biology, physical education and books in psychology. In some other subjects students are less well organised and do not make the best use of their study time. This affects their attitudes to learning.
- Study programmes are now in place for most students but these are not rigorously monitored enough for the current Year 13 students.
- Leaders have adopted new procedures from September 2014 which are focused on the key priorities of progress, girls' attainment and intervention. It is too early to see the impact of these changes.
- The academy is part of a loose consortium with other local sixth forms and this gives the students access to a greater range of subjects. The academy ensures that arrangements to monitor the attendance, progress and safety of these students are securely in place and effective.
- The number of students that go on to study in higher education and university has increased steadily as a result of well-managed and carefully-targeted advice and guidance. Students speak highly of the support and help they get in making decisions about the next steps in their lives.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137310
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	455949

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1027
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Barry
Headteacher	Gemma Ackred
Date of previous school inspection	3 July 2013
Telephone number	01702 344933
Email address	office@st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk

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